

The Directors of Studies in Computer Science Forum

Thursday 16 October 2025 at 14:00 via Zoom

<https://cam-ac-uk.zoom.us/j/84318566055?pwd=2CedIGhbGQ7agybbCudbZlZcDPbzS.1>

Unconfirmed Minutes

Members

Prof Robert Harle	(DOW)(Chair) RKH ✓	Apinan Hasthanasombat	(K) AHA ✓
Prof Paula Buttery	(CAI) PB ✓	Prof Alice Hutchings	(K) AHU X
Prof Timothy Jones	(CAI) TJ X	Prof Jamie Vicary	(K) JV X
Russell Moore	(CAI) RM X	Dr Carl Henrik Ek	(PEM) CHE ✓
Benedict Bunting	(CC) BB ✓	Prof Anil Madhavapeddy	(PEM) AM X
Dr David Greaves	(CC) DG ✓	Prof Amanda Prorok	(PEM) AP X
Francisco Vargas	(CC) FV X	Dr Ramsey Faragher	(Q) RF X
Prof Richard Mortier	(CHR) RMO X	Jasmin Jahic	(Q) JJ X
Dr Damon Wischik	(CHR) DW ✓	Dr Challenger Mishra	(Q) CMI X
Prof Larry Paulson	(CL) LP X	Dr Richard Sharp	(R) RS X
Dr Jonathan Sterling	(CL) JS ✓	Dr Jeremy Yallop	(R) JY X
Dr John Fawcett	(CTH CHU HH HO LC M N) JF ✓	Dr Richard Watts	(SE) RW X
Prof Alan Blackwell	(DAR) AB X	Matthew Ireland	(SID) MI ✓
Dmitrij Szamozvancev	(DOW) DS ✓	Prof Sean Holden	(T) SH ✓
Luana Bulat	(ED ME) LB ✓	Prof Neel Krishnaswami	(T) NK X
Dr Anthony Harris	(EM) AH X	Prof Frank Stajano	(T) FS ✓
Prof Thomas Sauerwald	(EM) TS ✓	Prof Hatice Gunes	(TH) HG ✓
Prof Srinivasan Keshav	(F) SK X	Jack Hughes	(TH) JH X
Prof Andreas Vlachos	(F) AV X	Prof Simon Moore	(TH) SM ✓
Dr Stephen Cummins	(G) SC ✓	Mr Aidan Bishop (Teaching Admin) ABI X	
Dr Loic Lannelongue	(JE) LL ✓	Mr Dean Dodds (Teaching Admin - Minutes)	
Prof Cecilia Mascolo	(JE) CM X	DD ✓	
Dr Christopher Town	(JE, W) CT ✓	Mrs Caroline Stewart (Department Secretary)	
Prof Robert Mullins	(JN PET) RMU ✓	CS X	
Prof Nicholas Lane	(JN, PET) NL X	Ms Becky Straw (Teaching Admin Manager) BS	
Umang Bhatt	(K) UB ✓	✓	

1 Apologies for Absence

Dr Jeremy Yallop
Prof Richard Mortier (Sabbatical)
Prof Alice Hutchings

Jasmin Jahic (tentative)
Mrs Caroline Stewart
Prof Cecilia Mascolo (Sabbatical)
Dr Anthony Harris (tentative)
Dr Richard Watts
Jack Hughes
Prof Robert Mullins
Prof Timothy Jones (Sabbatical)
Prof Andreas Vlachos

2 Declarations of Interest

RKH introduced this new item and asked everyone to declare any relevant interests when a conflict arises.

3 Notification of AOB

FS wished for timetabling to give students one day per week free from 1pm to 6pm, this time could be used for supervisions as it is currently difficult to organise.

4 Minutes of the meeting of 9 July 2025

No objections

5 Matters arising from the meeting of 9 July 2025

Completed actions from previous meetings: [Completed actions from DOS forum](#)

- 5.1** (4.1) CT was concerned about the early project proposal deadline and that it would disadvantage weaker students. Wished for the deadline to be pushed back as he had seen in the past weaker students improving given more time. RKH was keen to have the deadline brought forward after negative feedback from students about not being able to start on their project a few weeks into termtime. However RKH wished to look further at this. **(Action: RKH)**.
Will speak to this later in the agenda

(7.1) The introduction of UTO markers caused problems, the expectation was that UTO markers should mark, but SBH had found many had delegated marking to PhD students and Postdocs who lacked sufficient calibration experience. This resulted in additional moderation that could have been avoided. DG believed it was against the rules for PhD students to mark. RKH did not believe this was acceptable and would be followed up **(Action: RKH)**.

The department has made it clear that this is not appropriate so it is hoped that there will be an improvement on this this year.

(8) RW asked for DoSes to be made aware of modules and their content. RW had received questions from students and had been completely unaware and unable to assist. RW would like copies of the teaching materials, deadlines and assessment information. **(Action: BS & TMC)**.

RKH believed all material was available. FS mentioned that DoSes may occasionally not have access as he had trouble accessing material for the bootcamp. The email RKH had received suggested this problem was endemic but thinks it may be more sporadic. If DoSes are unable to access information, they should contact BS first.

FS wished for information to be placed on the course webpages rather than on moodle as was promised in the past. RKH believed this was a reasonable policy for things like PDFs of lecture notes.

6 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

Standing item

No matters were raised.

7 Admissions

7.1 New interviewer training course (and refresher)

The interviewer training course will be held on Friday the 21st of November at 2pm to 4pm and will be delivered online.

7.2 What's new in admissions this year

There are minimal changes this year. Still a number managed subject with the quotas remaining unchanged from recent years. Although there have been some changes to the admin work. The UCAS form has split the personal statement into three sections, based on candidate's feedback and to give them more structure. We have been asked to ignore the section headings this year and treat the entire section as one text, as this is the first-year teachers and students may not be familiar with this change yet. Candidates should not be penalised if the text is in the wrong section.

New policy on fraud as some candidates will sit exams as many as five times, but only tell us about the best of those sittings, which is against UCAS and university regulations. Due to better data sharing arrangements with exam boards worldwide, there is a much higher chance that we will catch incidents of fraud.

New process for candidates to submit an Extenuating Circumstances Form (ECF). This makes no difference to us but does make it easier for the candidate if they have any difficulties, particularly relevant for candidates experiencing significant personal difficulties. We will potentially see more ECFs and they may involve more serious circumstances.

Some contextual flags in the SMI will change, polar flags will disappear. This was a measure of candidates from disadvantaged backgrounds but turned out to be unreliable and only worked in areas with a large, deprived population and not in other areas. We have the Indicator of Multiple Deprivation, and a new metric called the SEISA which is similar to the IMD but with a higher resolution for areas with a lower population density. The SEISA takes into account crime, average number of people in a household, average household income and typical academic achievement. SEISA is better for rural deprivation than IMD, which struggles to classify meaningfully

SM asked for guidance for who should be interviewed. Wished to only interview six people for every place, but was under pressure from the admissions tutor to consider those from disadvantaged backgrounds. JF believed this was a common problem and believed the TMUA could be used as a deselection tool and then subject convenors.

JF explained that the deprivation metrics did not overlap, students will often only show up on one of the flags and not multiple.

UCAS has been doing work on predicted grade accuracy. Only 5% of A-Level students doing 3/more A-Levels achieved above predictions. 70% of predictions were out by at least one grade. The gap between predictions and achievement is widening over time. Wider gap for asian/black/other ethnicities, from higher deprivation, and from schools with lower mean prior achievement, lower entry req courses, and higher mean deprivation. Lower gap for whites, males in mixed schools, and schools: 6th form colleges, lower mean deprivation, higher prior achievement, applying for higher entry req courses.

For Computer Science, 95% of offer-holders (with A-Level) meet their offers. So if an offer is made to an A level student, they are likely to arrive. That tails off rapidly for overseas offer holders, two to one or even two and a half to one for mature applicants.

60% of UK A-Level sitters who are doing 3/more A-Levels meet the min offer level (**A). Need to rely on forms of assessment, interview and TMUA in particular.

There are 3.80 A-Level candidates who meet the min level per offer we make. Note the contrast with about 8 A-level applicants per offer. That's the top ratio in Cam; Econ is next at 2.78. Note these are as a proportion of ALL offers made, incl. to international students.

JF looked at statistics from last year's TMUA. High mean point biserial (good correlation with qu and overall scores -- each question is pulling its weight and discriminating well) forms of test were VERY well balanced, most candidate used all time but finished. Satisfactory reliability and low measurement error. Relative few DIF (differentiated item function -- some subgroups performing differently from the average, none by school type or ethnicity. e.g. M/F, ethnicity, first language. Psychometrician's report -- Person Vue were VERY impressed with test performance. Item response theory; rasch calibrated. capping at 1.0 and 9.0, about 10 out of 10,000 who scored full marks -- spreads them out very well capping give 9.0 to a small proportion at the top.

Improved internal administrative processes and increased promotion of bursaries.

Waiving TMUA/other requirements for war-torn regions and will consider application without TMUA score, although may not offer a place.

The university is concerned about the use of AI in interviews. Please have a plan for what to do if candidates cheat, for example watching their eyes to see if they are reading. In future we may return to in person interviews and reinstate the overseas interview scheme, being discussed but nothing confirmed. JF asked if anyone had thoughts on this or wanted to volunteer for overseas admissions.

RKH asked about TMUA being used for deselection, was unsure of the cutoff point. JF spoke about the coloured bars, blue is a recommendation for interview, orange means take a holistic view and red means unlikely to get through the interview process. These bars vary based on country and in some countries are broken down into school type and gender.

DW asked how TMUA scores corresponded to first year performance. JF explained this was being uploaded to the tableau blue system and would be available soon.

8 Tripos matters

8.1 Software and Security Engineering

Software and Security Engineering was originally run by Ross Anderson but is now being run with guest lecturers. Student feedback was not positive and lecturers felt the material was outdated. The course will be revamped, this year's version will be shorter focusing on the relevant things. Will retain one exam question which all IAs will need to answer and will have no choice. FS understood that the course would be discontinued, RKH clarified that he felt some elements had to be covered but it would be dissolved into other courses. Some had already been absorbed into the bootcamp. Course will end but looking for places to teach the elements of it elsewhere. Advised to give fewer supervisions, only two.

8.2 Randomised Algorithms replaced with Algebraic Techniques for Programming

Randomised Algorithms is not running this year and a new course Algebraic Techniques for Programming will replace it.

8.3 IA Bootcamp

Response to the bootcamp was largely positive, with strong student engagement. 132 students touched on how to use git, GitHub, writing better quality python, peer reviews in GitHub, some data science thanks to DW, some AI from LLMs (not technical, purely practical). RKH was impressed by what students accomplished in 48 hours, majority of students seemed to enjoy, will be getting more formal feedback. Planning to continue with this next year. The weakness for this year's cohort is that what they learned isn't picked up in any further courses, will endeavour to change that in future years.

FS had read the handouts and thought it was a good idea. Was concerned about having students use an LLM to write code and then to review what comes out, different from other courses unsure if they could program without the LLM. RKH had explained this to students during the bootcamp and that this method did not continue for the rest of the course.

DG believed the prearrival advice to students needs to be improved. RKH agreed, a lot of the people who said they could help with the bootcamp, ultimately could not so notes were written in the last week.

8.4 Part II Project Proposal Submission

A significant number of students missed the part two deadline, twenty or thirty, TMC will look at this to see if there is anything we can do (**Action: RKH**). CT asked if there was a hard deadline, RKH responded that the break of term was the nominal hard deadline. FS explained that some students were so caught up with internships that they didn't check their emails from supervisors, suggested a more official notification. (**Action: BS**). SH will deliver the 'how to do a part II project' talk, asked people to send him advice and messages to students, such as reminding students that they should not allow their internships to interfere with their project. (**Action: All**).

8.5 Part II project supervision payment guidance

We now have UTO markers and day-to-day supervisors. The expectation is the college should pay fees to day-to-day supervisor, but no fees for the UTO marker as this is part of their teaching load.

9 Any other business

9.1 Directors of Studies views on supporting supervision scheduling [Scheduling undergraduate supervisions.docx](#)

The central university has observed that it is difficult to schedule supervisions. Creating a central system for organising them.

JF declared a conflict of interest, he was involved in preparing the paper, so some software is what JF uses, no financial stake in this.

Responses needs to be send by January, individual responses, unsure if there will be a departmental response. RKH and Alastair will discuss. Will be discussed in the next meeting.
(Action: RKH & All).

9.2 Timetabling in afternoons

FS wished for timetabling to give students one day per week free from 1pm to 6pm, this time could be used for supervision as it is currently difficult to organise. For IA and IB only, currently impossible to finish all supervisions in one day.

RKH believed it was hard to balance as there are similar requests for sport. RKH will take this to TMC. **(Action: RKH).**

10 Date of next meeting: 23 Jan 2025 at 2pm

RKH is stepping down as chair, this is his last meeting, and CM will take over. Will still respond to emails about this meeting until January but suggesting CCing in CM.